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August 2022 Newsletter

Hello everyone, how are you doing?

It is August and we are already in the latter half of this year.

COVID 19 is now in its third year as a global pandemic, but it shows no signs of abating, and with the recent appearance of a new strain of Omicron, the number of infected people is increasing again. In Japan, the situation, which was thought to be finally coming to an end, has reversed its course, and is now spreading as the 7th wave.

The situation in Ukraine with Russia's ongoing offensive met by Ukraine's defensive battles, the dismissal of Prime Minister Johnson in the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka's President fleeing the country due to the political and economic deadlock, and assassination with a gun of the former Prime Minister Abe in Japan while delivering a campaign speech for a candidate are examples of how the world is evolving undoubtedly as a place of impermanence.

I temporarily returned to Japan in June and July and spent busy and fulfilling days with preparatory meetings at Headquarters and getting together with various people.

While doing my morning and evening recitation amid those days, I suddenly noticed something, and this month I would like to share what I felt through that experience.

It was a simple question as to why we begin our sutra recitation with "Meditation on the Place of the Way." Normally, Buddhist chanting begins with "Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures," but the Kyoten we recite today begins with "Meditation on the Place of the Way" followed by "Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures." A closer examination revealed that all of our organization's past Kyoten began with "Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures," but the current version of the Kyoten has been revised to begin with "Meditation on the Place of the Way." I just now realized the deep thoughts the President had put into the revision.

As stated in our Members Vow, "In the spirit of lay Buddhists," it is important to find ways to apply the teachings in one's own life. Without making the distinction between the monastic and lay Buddhists, the Buddha taught that significance of the teachings come to life only when they are applied in the daily lives of the people. It is not just by learning and understanding the teachings but by applying the teachings through practice, we are embodying the meaning of the teachings which is precisely connected to our true awakening

The sequence of events that led to the "Lotus Sutra" was that after Shakyamuni Buddha entered nirvana, his disciples left the words he had preached as sutras to be handed down to the future generations.

However, gradually the teachings somewhat deviated from the heart and mind of the awakened Shakyamuni Buddha and became at times authoritarian or difficult to understand.

The Lotus Sutra was expounded out of a strong desire to return to the spirit (heart) of Shakyamuni Buddha

“Meditation on the Place of the Way” is a passage from Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, “The Transcendent Powers of the Tathagata.”

In other words --- wherever the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are recited, studied, or put into practice is the “place of the Way (dojo) --- This means it is important to be aware that every place in our daily lives is indeed the “Buddhist Place of the Way,” a dignified place that has the same significance as the place where Shakyamuni Buddha attained Supreme Perfect Awakening.

This is what we are taught to keep in mind as believers of the faith.

There is a famous passage in the words of the Buddha:

Do not chase after the past

Or place expectations on the future.

The past no longer is.

And the future has not yet come.

Therefore, we must clearly observe things as they are in the very here and now

Without being swayed or agitated.

Deeply discern and put into practice

Diligently do what must be done today.

For who knows about tomorrow? Death comes unexpectedly.

Therefore, it is meaningful to chant the “Meditation on the Place of the Way” at the beginning of the sutra recitation, valuing the spirit of "the place I am here and now is the place for the practice of my faith and to improve myself " which is to cherish the "here and now." In today's increasingly chaotic society, I believe that this can show many people how a true human being should live.

It seems this month will be days of intense heat, hotter than usual. Please take good care of yourself, stay healthy, and live each day in good spirits with gratitude.



Gassho
Rev. Tomokazu Hatakeyama
Minister RKNY